

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 21, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

Thank you for your continued efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and address concerns regarding new strands of the coronavirus, including B.1.1.529, the Omicron variant.

The Biden Administration's recent "Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease 2019" limits the travel of noncitizens from several countries, including South Africa, to the United States. We are concerned this will impact our essential agriculture workers participating in the H-2A guest worker program.

As you know, due to ongoing workforce shortages our country continues to face, American farmers continue to utilize the H-2A guestworker visa program to fill vacant farm positions. The most recent available data indicates that approximately 7,000 of these valued essential workers originate from South Africa. Many American farmers are counting on their timely arrivals to the U.S. this upcoming February, March, and April, as they make plans for their important upcoming growing seasons. Without an exemption to the recently imposed travel restrictions, South African H-2A worker absences will limit the ability of American farms to continue production of food, fuel, and fiber for our nation during this critical time, especially amidst the severe supply chain disruptions currently taking place. In addition, it is imperative that our U.S. embassies in these countries have the appropriate resources to process H-2A visas to adequately conduct necessary appointments and interviews prior to H-2A workers traveling to the U.S.

We write today to request that H-2A workers coming to the United States be exempt from the travel restrictions outlined in the proclamation. Additionally, this request is bolstered by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency designation of food and agricultural workers as essential during the pandemic.

While we believe protecting our nation from new strains of COVID-19 is critically important, we also believe it is in our national interest to ensure production of food, fuel, and fiber. Recognizing the importance of mitigating the spread of new strains of COVID-19, we request that with proper health and safety precautions in place, H-2A workers from South Africa be allowed to travel to the United States to work and operate on American farms to grow our country's safe and nutritious food.

Sincerely,



Frank D. Lucas
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress



Fred Upton
Member of Congress



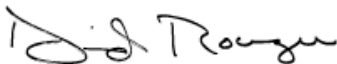
Kelly Armstrong
Member of Congress



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress



Trent Kelly
Member of Congress



David Rouzer
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson
Member of Congress



John Rose
Member of Congress



Rick Crawford
Member of Congress



Tracey Mann
Member of Congress



Patrick McHenry
Member of Congress



Mariannette Miller-Meeks, M.D.
Member of Congress



Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress



Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress



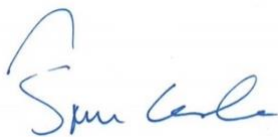
Julia Letlow
Member of Congress



Jeff Van Drew
Member of Congress



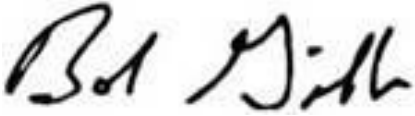
Ted Budd
Member of Congress



Tom Cole
Member of Congress



Elise M. Stefanik
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Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
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Randy Feenstra
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Troy Balderson
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Mike Simpson
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Peter Meijer
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Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Ron Estes
Member of Congress



Jake LaTurner
Member of Congress

cc Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack